

# Minutes of Meeting of Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum

8<sup>th</sup> April 2022

## Attendance

### Members:

Councillor Billy Hutchinson

Councillor Cllr Emmet McDonagh-Brown (*for Councillor Nuala McAlister*)

Alderman Brian Kingston

Councillor Ryan Murphy (*for Councillor Ciaran Beattie*)

Alderman Jim Rodgers (*for Alderman Sonia Copeland*)

Councillor Áine Groogan

Councillor Mal O'Hara

Councillor Brian Heading (*for Councillor Donal Lyons*)

**Apologies:** Councillor Ciaran Beattie, Councillor Nuala McAlister, Councillor Donal Lyons, Councillor Fiona Ferguson and Alderman Sonia Copeland.

### Officers:

John Walsh, Chief Executive

Ronan Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources

Christine Sheridan, Head of Human Resources (for Item 1)

Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

## 1. Covid Update

The Head of HR provided an update on the number of staff who are reporting as Covid positive and unable to work and advised that services continue to monitor impacts on service delivery reallocating staff where required. She advised that this has resulted in minimal impact on delivery of critical services. Members noted that the Workforce Testing programme, through which council access supplies of Lateral Flow Tests will cease with effect from 22 April 2022, following this staff with symptoms will need to request home tests in order to end self-isolation.

The Head of HR also provided an update on the approach for organisational recovery and outlined the proposals for a phased return to the office for those staff still working from home. She stressed that social distancing requirements and other mitigations are still impacting full recovery of front-line service delivery. Regular meetings continue with the management and trade union working group and the recovery of customer related services will be prioritised in

the first instance. A report will be presented to April SP&R Committee with further detail on the approach outlined.

## **2. Audit and Risk Panel Attendance**

The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources highlighted to Members that, at its meeting in March, the Audit and Risk Panel (A&RP) approved the statement of purpose and terms of reference of the A&RP and the Audit Assurance Board along with the indicative programme of business for 2022. He advised that as part of this item, the Panel discussed attendance of Members at the meetings, and it was agreed to highlight to Party Group Leaders the importance for each Party's representative to attend these on a consistent basis. In relation to some queries raised by Members, the Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Finance and Resources advised that whilst nominees can attend, members of the A&RP require specific training. Members to follow up with their Party representatives in advance of the next meeting in June.

## **3. Ukraine Evacuee Support Scheme**

The Chief Executive provided an update for Members on the Ukraine evacuee support scheme in Northern Ireland. He advised that work is ongoing with the Executive Office who are leading on the planning and preparation with Local Government. The Chief Executive outlined for Members the proposed approach for community advice centres and detailed the plans for the Belfast Community Advice Centre including the location, proposed opening date, and the support services that will be represented at the centre. In relation to some queries raised by Members in relation to translation services and a designated council point of contact for Members it was agreed that a point of contact would be circulated imminently. Members will be kept informed as the plans progress.

## **4. Planning Update**

The Chief Executive updated the Forum on the live planning applications and informed the Forum of applications that were being presented to the Planning Committee in April. In relation to the Local Development Plan, he advised that officers continue to engage with DfI and Northern Ireland Water (NIW) in order to address ongoing concerns.

Members noted that the NI Assembly, Public Accounts Committee (PAC) published a report and recommendations in relation to Planning in Northern Ireland in March 2022. An overview of this report and the recommended response from Council will be presented to April SP&R Committee.

## **5. AOB**

### **Official visit of Martin Walsh, Secretary of Labour for the US Administration**

The Chief Executive highlighted an upcoming official visit of Martin Walsh, Secretary of Labour for the US Administration in May. He outlined the requests sought from the Council including a request to address a full Council meeting. It was noted that a report outlining the specific requests sought would be submitted to April SP&R Committee for Members consideration.

### **Levelling up Fund Round 2**

The Chief Executive outlined the timeframes for Round 2 of the UK Levelling Up Fund, a capital fund announced as part of the UK Government's agenda to invest in local infrastructure and uplift communities and local areas that have fallen behind. He briefed Members on potential bids for Round 2 and it was noted that a further update would be brought to the next Party Leaders Forum meeting.

### **arc21 Residual Waste Treatment Plant**

The Chief Executive provided an update for Members following the recent planning permission decision made by the Infrastructure Minister. He advised that legal opinion is being sought and Party Group Leaders will be briefed once this process is complete.

### **Industrial Action**

The Head of Human Resources provided an update on the recent industrial action by members of Unite trade union which took place week commencing Monday 21st March. Members noted that should further industrial action take place the processes followed during this action would be reinstated. Some Members advised that if any further action was to be taken that any Council meetings during that period be rescheduled. A report will be presented to SP&R committee in April to include a full update should the industrial action materialise.

### **Belfast Multi Cultural Association Building**

The Chief Executive referred to a fire at the Belfast Multi Cultural Association Building which had occurred earlier that morning, the second in the space of 14 months. Whilst there were few details available at this stage, he advised that officers in City and Neighbourhood Services were working to provide support where possible.

### **Recruitment of Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty**

The Head of HR raised an issue in relation to the constitution for the selection panel for the Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty. The details of the recruitment process to be circulated for Members to further consider.